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XIV.—AÏMER LE CHÉTIF.

In the epic family of Aymeri de Narbonne, by far the strangest figure is that of Aïmer le Chétif. Without sharing in the grotesqueness of Hernaut le Roux, Aïmer has a mysteriousness and the shadow of an unknown misfortune, which draw powerfully the sympathetic imagination. Evidently we are dealing with one of the greatest of ancient heroes, yet the complete disappearance of the epics that sang his exploits has buried in oblivion his peculiar claim to glory. If he has subsisted at all, it has been as a fallen deity. Indeed, the casual reader of the poems still extant in which he is mentioned, might suppose him the least of all his brethren, one of the humblest and most recent additions to the epic roll. It is in fact likely, as we shall see, that the meaning of his epithet *le chétif* was already forgotten seven hundred years ago.

The oldest text that mentions Aïmer is the *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*, which dates from the close of the eleventh century or from somewhat earlier. It is very likely that he was mentioned in the source whence was drawn the *Fragment de la Haye*. The brevity of the *Fragment* would explain the absence of his name, as of that of Guillaume.

The presence of the youngest brother, Wibelin, and of the adult son of Bernart, leads us to suppose that both Aïmer and Guillaume appeared in the original, which probably antedated the *Pèlerinage* by from seventy-five to one hundred years. Aïmer is mentioned also in the following poems: *Aliscans*, *Enfances Vivien*, *Enfances Guillaume*, *Siege de Barbastre*, *les Narbonois*, *Prise de Cordres*, *Aymeri de Narbonne*, *Mort Aymeri*, *Guibert d'Andrenas*, *Aye d'Avignon*, *Elie de St. Giles*, and *Bueve de Comarcis*. Our hero also appears in the *Willehalm* of Wolfram von Eschenbach, in the *Storie Nerbonesi*, and in the record of Aubri de Trois-Fontaines.

We learn the following facts from these poems. Aïmer was the sixth son of Aymeri de Narbonne; he was driven from home along with his brothers (le *département* des enfants Aymeri), and went to Paris with them. His father had given him the task of conquering "Espagne la grant," and he succeeds after a time in forming an army, composed largely of adventurers, and sets out for Spain. He probably conquered for himself a realm in "Spain," that is, in Catalonia; at any rate, all accounts represent him as warring without cease against the Saracens. The poets state that he would never sleep under a roof. He generally appears alone with his men, few in number. He seems to love solitude, and frequently appears to be poor and wretched. In at least two epics, he appears all at once with his army, in time to decide favorably a desperate struggle with the enemy. The *Mort Aymeri* recounts that he was slain in Spain, at "Porpaillart sur mer" (see lines 547-48; 591-93; 1384-87).

A few typical passages concerning this strange hero may be of interest.

In the *Nerbonois*, he makes a vow never to take shelter under a roof, nor to sleep in a bed:

Puis que g'istrai do crestien regné
Et j'enterrai en la paieneté,
Chevron ne laste n'ert sor moi por oré,
Ne ne jerrai desoz fete levé,

Se Sarrazin ne m'ont enprisoné;
Mes an montaignes o en bois o en pré
Lez les rivières ferai tandre mon tré.

(2916-23.)

And in other passages of the same poem :

Ci voi venir le gentil bachelier
Que l'an apele le chétif Aymer.
Ainz ne doigna dedanz vile osteler.

(5926-28.)

Ja ne jeüst dedanz sale pavée,
N'an borc n'an vile ne soz cortine ovrée.

(6706-07.)

From *Aymeri de Narbonne* :

Si ne vost onques gesir, tant com fu vis,
En tor entie ne en palès votiz.

(4593-94.)

In the arrival of the armies for the relief of Orange in *Aliscans*, we find our hero choosing a camp beyond that of the others, and showing unwillingness to dine with his friends. His brother goes to meet him, and

Dedens Orenge le va ot lui mener,
En Gloriete, son palais principel;
Mais Aïmers ne li vaut creanter.
Defors les autres fist sa gent osteler.

Et dist Guillames—"Un don vos voiel rover:
A moi prengiés cest prumerain souper!"
Il li otroient, ne li vuelent véer,
Mais a grant force i mainent Aïmer.

(4255-64.)¹

Another thing which seems to distinguish Aïmer is his poverty. This appears from a number of passages. We read of the arrival of Aïmer and his men in the *Narbonois* :

¹ The third, fourth, and last lines of this passage would not be properly understood, were it not for external evidence as to the habits of our hero. The passage, it may be added, is due to the remanieurs, at least in so far as Aïmer's welcoming to Gloriette is concerned. His brother was besieged in the city, and cannot have hastened to meet him.

La ont veü maint chevalier armé.
 De laides armes estoient adobé.
 Lor escu sont percié et estroié,
 Et lor hauberc n'estoient reolé,
 Enrooillié sont de pluie et d'oré.

(6573-77.)

Similarly, in lines 5918, 6820-25. Again in *Aliscans*:

Mais n'ont escu ne soit rous et crois.
 Leur hauberc sont de sueur tous noircis,
 Leur elmes quas; n'eurent pas brans forbis.

(4916-18.)

It may be that this poverty is an attempt of the poets to explain the epithet *chétif*; or again it may be that the poverty comes from the oldest legend concerning the hero, thus being a genuine "historical" trait. He is the only one of the sons of Aymeri de Narbonne who does not come to possess, according to the poems, cities and lands.¹ There are other sources that ascribe to him such possessions in Spain, yet the *Covenant Vivien*, a poem whose action has preëminently Spain as its scene, does not mention a single time the name of our hero.

In spite of the fact that, in the most ancient sources, Spain seems to have been the theatre of the exploits of Aïmer, there was a persistent legend that ascribed to him a career at "St. Marc de Venis." It is this legend which is given by Aubri de Trois-Fontaines, and Wolfram follows it, representing him as arriving from Venice, and as having defended that city against the "patriarc von Agley." Wolfram even calls him the Venetian.²

The only complete and lengthy account of our hero is found in the *Storie Nerbonesi*.³ He seems to have been a

¹ The *Willehalm*, 241, depicts the extreme poverty of our hero.

² Several mss. give Aimer's battle cry as "Venice la gastée." vid. *Aliscans*, edition Jonckbloet, 5401, and the variant given by Rolin under line 5130. There may be confusion here with the cry of Garin: see later argument.

³ Edited by Isola, Bologna, 1877-1887, two vols.

favorite personage with the author, and is in reality the hero of the first volume of this compilation as printed by Isola—that is, of the first four books. The recital here given, although evidently not a record of the earliest poems concerning Aïmer, presents none the less a stage of his legend more ancient than that preserved in the extant French models, and merits a statement in detail.

We are told that Aymeri, having received a mortal insult at the hands of an enemy, before the eyes of Charlemagne and his court, returns in wrath to Narbonne and decides to test his six oldest sons, to see if they will ever be able to avenge his quarrel. He examines their rooms, and flies into a passion on finding in those of Bernard, the eldest, and of Bovon only falcons and instruments of falconry and the chase. In the rooms of Guillaume and Aïmer he finds nothing but weapons of warfare. He declares these two alone to be his sons. He summons them all to joust with him, in order to try their strength. Aïmer, when his turn arrives, says that he fears to tilt against his father, lest he kill him. His father urges him to strike his hardest, but he perceives that Aïmer spares him slightly as they come together, and for this he gives him his curse, saying: "O disobedient son! I curse you because you have not obeyed my injunction, and I command that you be forever called *Aïmer le chétif* (il cattivo), and I order you, when you have once been dubbed knight, never to sleep within walls, nor to eat at a table, nor are you ever to hold a fief from any man alive!" Aymeri drives away his six sons, commanding them to go to Paris, and to there avenge the insult inflicted upon him. They set out, and are soon overtaken by a servant, who has been sent by their mother with clothing and money. Aïmer gives him a beating, and declares that they will know how to take care of themselves. In the adventures of the journey and in those at Paris, it is Aïmer who plays the main rôle. He does not forget his father's injunction, and eats from his shield, seated on the ground.

At the end of a year, Charlemagne gave lands to the brothers of Aïmer and regretted that the curse of Aymeri prevented him from doing the same by him, for he had taken him in great affection. He assigned him ten thousand men, and bade him go to Spain and conquer himself a city and realm. The king tells him that he can never be his subject, because of the terms of his father's malediction. Aïmer gathers together an army made up of thieves, robbers and murderers, and sets out for Spain.

In beginning the description of the adventures of our hero, the author shows clearly that he has all his sympathy and admiration. He says of him that he was called *Aïmer le chétif* by reason of his father's curse, but that he, the author, would call him rather Aïmer the good.¹ Aïmer wages a successful war, and takes a number of cities, among them Pampelune. He thus became a great prince, but he always remained in the open fields, never ate at a table and never drank wine.

It now happened that the Saracens, informed of the departure of the sons of Aymeri, arrived to lay siege to the city. An old family servant is sent by Aymeri to ask for assistance from his sons. This messenger finally reaches Spain in search of Aïmer, and finds him asleep, clad in armor, under an oak. Aïmer refuses aid, although the thought of his gentle mother in danger makes him shed tears. He alleges the cruel treatment of his father, by reason of which he has not slept within walls nor in a bed for seven years, nor has he eaten at table or drunk wine. After the departure of the messenger, however, Aïmer decides to march to the relief of Narbonne. He arrives at a critical moment in the battle for the delivery of the city. His approaching army presents an uncouth and strange appearance, and those of the city take it at first for a fresh body of Saracens. The arrival of Aïmer of course decides the battle in favor of the Christians. The scene of

¹L. c., 112, 113.

the reconciliation between father and son is one of great beauty. Aymeri recalls his curse, and blesses Aïmer.¹

Aïmer now betakes himself to Paris with his brothers, where he receives the blessing of Charlemagne, and is knighted by him.² He is soon informed that Tibant, the powerful Saracen king, is planning to march against him in Spain, in order to avenge the death of some of his relatives, slain by Aïmer. He therefore sets out in haste for Spain. He is besieged by the enemy in Pampelune. Guillaume comes to his rescue and the Saracens are defeated.

A number of years pass, during which Aïmer is said never to be without war. He has with him Vivien, the son of his brother Garin. He grants him permission to make a foray into "Portugal," urging him to return at once. Vivien meets with success, and is tempted to remain. His adversaries soon surround him, and besiege him in a city which he has seized. He sends word of his predicament to his uncle, who endeavors to reach him, but is driven back. Vivien manages to hold out by taking refuge in a strong castle, and finally Aïmer returns to the charge with a new army. In this army is another nephew, Bertran, who had been sent from Orange, the new seat of Guillaume, in order to bring help for the relief of that city, also besieged by the enemy. Bertran has come to Spain to enlist the aid of Aïmer. After a victory resulting in the setting-free of Vivien, Aïmer, Bertran, Vivien and the others set out by forced marches for Orange. They arrive at the same time as the succor from France. Aïmer is made commander-in-chief. The struggle is indeed terrible. Two of Aïmer's brothers lose their lives, and he himself is so wounded that he dies after the victory. He left two sons, Gautier and Berengier.

¹ In the remaining account of our hero's life, no mention is made of his continuing his former mode of life. Cf. following note.

² An inadvertence has evidently been committed, in that Aïmer was told to begin his strange way of life *after* having been knighted. As we have seen, he begins it before. Cf., later, testimony of the *Narbonois* on this point.

Such is the life of our hero according to the account written by Andrea da Barberino, an account which, according to the author, was translated by him from the French. There are many things in this account which are supported by external evidence of a character not to be contradicted, and I believe that this recital represents a stage of the legend more ancient than any other preserved, yet a stage far from the most ancient that ever existed. There are of course events in this recital which are manifestly due to the compiler.

The account as it has just been given differs from the one found in the poems in the following important points: The explanation given of Aïmer's strange way of living; the relative importance of the rôle of Aïmer in the journey to Paris, and the events there; the holding of a fief by Aïmer; the manner of the relief brought by the hero to Narbonne, and similarly later to Orange; the scene of his exploits; the relations between him and Vivien on the one hand, and between Vivien and Guillaume on the other; the place of his death.

What was the origin of Aïmer's strange custom of never sleeping under a roof, of never eating at a table, etc.? The *Nerbonesi*, as we have seen, ascribe this to his father's having cursed him. The only other explanation with which I am familiar is found in the *Nerbonois*, lines 2911-23. In this passage, the young hero, who is about to start for Spain, stands before Charlemagne and makes a vow: having once entered the Saracen land, he will never shelter himself under a roof, unless a prisoner and thus unable to help himself, but will ever remain in the woods and meadows, and on the banks of streams.

These two explanations probably go back to a common source, different as they at first appear. It will be remembered that, in the *Nerbonesi*, Aïmer is instructed to act as he says he will in the vow, *after he has been dubbed knight*. This is really what happens in the poem, for the adoubement follows immediately the vow. That is, Aïmer is perhaps

simply carrying out his father's instructions. The insertion into the Italian account of the peculiar clause: *quando tu sarai fatto cavaliere*, leaves no doubt that the sources whence came this account were acquainted with the tradition of Aïmer's having made such a vow on being dubbed knight by Charlemagne. The vow itself has certain marks of high antiquity. If it were a new invention made to explain the peculiar mode of life of the hero, it would not contain mention of so many things unknown to the poems and traditions now extant. For instance, in line 2920, we find Aïmer qualifying his vow: "provided the Saracens do not have me in prison" (cf. lines 3010-3020). These passages leave no doubt that anciently the hero suffered a captivity and was rescued by the emperor. Then, too, the lines 2923-29 seem to contain a prophecy of events not recounted by any poem extant. Such traits as these are earmarks of truth, and the critic can not pass them by.

There is some evidence supporting the tradition of a hostility between Aïmer and his father. In the *Prise de Cordres* there are two quarrels between father and son—275-308 and 406-441.¹ The father shows here something like a settled animosity towards Aïmer. In the *Nerbonois*, 342-358, another son, Bernart, expresses the very same sentiments as Aïmer in the second of the above passages, yet Aymeri only laughs and says that he is proud of such a son. To the extent, then, that Aymeri appears more severe against Aïmer than against his other sons, the first explanation of our hero's ways of living is supported.

Another point that merits perhaps investigation is the warning given Aïmer in the Italian account never to hold a fief from any one. Such a charge, for a man of Aïmer's

¹ The punctuation of this passage is faulty. The speech of Aymeri beginning in line 417 is interrupted by the son in line 424. From this point to line 429, the words are said by the son. Ph. Aug. Becker thinks this scene imitated from one in *Guibert d'Andrenas*, see *Zeit. f. Rom. Phil.*, xxii, p. 419, note 3.

rank, was equivalent to banishment, and this is really what happens. He refuses, according to the *Nerbonois*, to accept a fief in France, but declares that he will conquer one in Spain. He does, however, offer to do homage for this fief to Charlemagne, who accepts in advance.¹

It would be hard to find any passage worthy of credence which relates that Aïmer held a fief anywhere. In fact, the trend of the testimony is rather the other way. He seems to have plunged into the heart of "Spain," and to have been lost to sight. We read, for instance, in *Guibert d'Andrenas*, that Guibert, told by his father to go and summon Aïmer to send aid, replies :

Ou le porrai trouver ?
Je ne sai tant venir ne aler
Que a nul homme em puisse oïr parler
Qui m'en seüst nouveles aconter,
Si parfont est dedens Espaigne entrez.²

The impression of Aïmer's remoteness is also felt in the well-known passage of *Aliscans*, 2601-03, and in lines 6619, 6627, of the *Nerbonois*.

To sum up, there is more likelihood of the vow being primitive than the account of Andrea, although this latter is based evidently on very ancient data in the epic life of the hero. The quarrel with his father seems to be the knot that attached him to the cycle of Orange, and bears witness to his preëxistent fame. The vow is the knot that attached an independent hero in the south-land to the great northern emperor. Jongleurs from the north probably found this hero sung in the south as the most bitter enemy of the Saracens in Spain. For patriotic and utilitarian reasons, it

¹ There is a passage of doubtful authority in the *Prise de Cordres*, *Appendice*, lines 294-97, ascribing to our hero a fief. Louis has taken Saragoce, and confers it on Aïmer. The poet adds a line bearing witness to Aïmer's reputation for poverty, or to his lack of landed possessions: *Car onques mais n'ot terre tenant ne en baillie*.

² Cited by Densusianu, *Prise de Cordres*, p. xcii. Similarly in the *Siège de Barbastre*, cited by Becker, *Quellenwert der Storie Nerbonesi*, Halle, 1898, p. 11, note 2.

was desirable to attach him to the mighty Charlemagne. He was perhaps represented as a Frank of the north, who, by reason of some family complications, swore to devote himself to the conquest of Spain. In the course of events, the cycle of Orange was able to lay hand upon him without shocking tradition, and the result was the stage of his legend represented in the *Nerbonesi*.

In the Italian account of the journey of the brothers to Paris and their adventures there, Aïmer seems to play the important rôle, whereas in the *Nerbonois* the person most in evidence is Hernaut. The appearance of Hernaut is always the signal for burlesque and buffoonery, and no one will maintain that a preponderating rôle given to such a character is a sign of high antiquity. If we had to choose between Hernaut and Aïmer on this count, we should certainly give the greater authority of age to the latter. Again, the importance of Aïmer here is in perfect keeping with the rôle which we know him to have played later, as seen by the poems still extant: he is everywhere spoken of as one of the most terrible antagonists of the Saracens; his arrival at an opportune moment decides two of the most momentous battles in the history of Narbonne and Orange. Indeed, to the trained reader, the manner in which his arrival is announced on these occasions is absolute evidence of his prééminence. For instance, in the well-known *endementiers* scene of *Aliscans*, which begins in line 4125, Guillaume sees his brothers arrive to deliver Orange. He sees arrive Hernaut and Bovon, and is full of joy; but, says the poet, he will be much more joyful soon, when Aïmer le chétif shall have come. Finally, Guillaume sees Aïmer, who arrives last, and he exclaims:

Ves la venir le caitif Aïmer,
L'omme del mont, por voir le puis conter,
Ke Sarrasin puent plus redouter!
Contre celui me convient il aler
Et deseur tos servir et honorer,
Car ainc paien ne laissa reposer.

(4246-4251).

The greatest hero arrives last. Similarly, in the *Nerbonois*, Dame Hermangart and her husband behold the arrival of the armies that are to relieve Narbonne. The last to arrive is Aïmer, and his presence encourages the besieged more than that of the others. In the same way, his arrival at the camp of the relieving forces is motivated to show his great importance, lines 6572-6629. The conclusion that Aïmer merits the important position given him in the portions of the story under discussion, seems imperative.

In regard to this very arrival of Aïmer at the two sieges in question, the Italian account offers valuable testimony to explain the action of the French poems, an action which is incomprehensible without this additional testimony. Let us take up these sieges in order.

We are told in *Aliscans*, when the messenger arrives at court for aid, that nearly all the brothers of Guillaume are present,

Mais n'i ert pas Aïmers li caitis.
En Espagne est entre les Sarrasis,
U se combat et par nuit et par dis.

(2601-03).

No messenger is sent to him, yet, to our surprise, he comes at the proper time to aid in relieving the city (see the passages just cited above). The Italian story, however, makes all plain, by telling of the trip of the messenger to Spain, where he warned Aïmer. The importance of this as a justification of the recital of Andrea is very great.

In the same way, the arrival of Aïmer before Narbonne in the *Nerbonois* is unmotivated, and finds its explanation in the messenger, sent as related in the *Nerbonesi*, to urge Aïmer to come to the relief of his parents.¹

¹ That a messenger really went to the brothers is indicated by a passage in the *Nerbonois*, 406-12. Becker, *Quellenwert*, p. 13, note, complains that the arbitrary sending of Aïmer to Spain by the poet of the *Nerbonois* (cf. p. 11), prevents the messenger from finding him at Paris with the other brothers, hence his arrival at Narbonne appears unmotivated. In the passage just cited, however, it is stated that the messenger is to seek the

Where was the scene of the exploits of Aïmer? Some of the French sources and the *Nerbonesi* answer, "In Spain"; while other French sources indicate Italy.

Some critics have not hesitated to affirm that Italy was the original scene of the exploits of Aïmer.¹ What are the facts? *Aliscans* seems to give a divided testimony. One passage has already been cited from this epic (lines 2601-03), which says in so many words that Aïmer is in Spain. Again, at the close of the poem, line 8379, it is stated that he returns to Spain. For the other passages, the matter is not so simple. We read, for instance,

Aïmers li caitis :
Ciex prist la terre de Saint Marc de Venis
Sor les paiens d'Espaigne.

(4178-80.)

And again of him and his men :

Par maintes fois ont paiens asentis
Dedens Espaigne, à Saint Marc de Venis.

(4919-20.)

I think that all of the passages that ascribe to Aïmer a career in Italy repose on an error in the lines 4178-80, cited above. These lines occur in a *laisse* in *i*, and it is my opinion that originally Garin, who for some reason was eliminated from the list of the brothers present, appeared in this *laisse*, where his name naturally would appear because of the assonance. Cf. the *laisse* in *i* beginning in line 5892 of the *Nerbonois*, where Garin arrives from Italy to aid in the relief of Narbonne. That all the children of Aymeri arrived

brothers one by one : *Tot un et un par estrange pais*. This is precisely what happens in the *Nerbonesi*, not only for Aïmer, but for the others as well : see *N.*, I, pp. 161-171. Dame Hermangart (vol. II, *Nerbonois*, p. 43, lines 16-17), breathes a blessing on *the one who went* to tell Aïmer of the sore straits of Narbonne.

¹ Vid. Densusianu, *Prise de Cordres*, p. xcii, note; Becker, *Quellenwert*, p. 11. The first of these critics says: "Peut-être arrivera-t-on un jour à identifier ce fils d'Aymeri de Narbonne avec quelque personnage historique qui s'était distingué contre les Sarrasins en Italie." Probably the earliest critic to draw attention to the ascription to Aïmer of Venice was Demaison, *Aymeri de Narbonne*, p. ccxi, ss.

before Orange, there can be little doubt, although the only mss. that mention Garin by name are *m* (Boulogne), and *d* (Bib. Nat. 2494), certainly two of the best mss. The first mentions him in line 4635, the second in 7736. It follows from the reading of line 1915 in *m*, and from the last *laisse* of this ms., cited on p. 109 of the *Varianten* of Rolin, *Aliscans*, that Garin was present. Cf. in *m* lines 558 and 6646. The question of the presence of Garin is certainly one of the most puzzling. It will be agreed, however, that if he was present, the *laisse* in *i* under discussion is where his name would naturally appear. If it can be shown that there was any reason why Garin's name should have been suppressed in *Aliscans*, the probability that it formerly stood in the *laisse* in question will be heightened. A full discussion of the presence or absence of Garin would require a whole article. I have recently touched on this question in another place, and can here only summarize the reasons which lead me to believe that Garin has been suppressed in the original sources from which *Aliscans* was formed.¹

The *Covenant Vivien* is composed from two separate poems, one of which also contributed largely to the formation of the first part of *Aliscans*. In one of these poems, Garin, whom a new tradition ascribed to Vivien as father, was still alive; in the other, he was already dead. Hence the inconsistency which appears in the words: *Filz fu Garin* (*Cov. Viv.*, 123, 143-144), as compared with: *Filz sui Garin* (1833). The action of the poem which we call *Aliscans* being supposed to follow that of the *Cov. Viv.*, nothing could be done except to take the last time limit of the *Covenant*: that is, the death of Garin was pre-supposed.² It happened, however, that among

¹ *Origin of the Covenant Vivien*, in *The University of Missouri Studies*, No. 2, published by the University, 1902. See especially section 15, pp. 45, 46, and cf. p. 8.

² In line 827 of *Aliscans*, Guillaume says to the dying Vivien, explaining that he can hear his confession, and give absolution, as the nearest relative in the absence of a priest: "Je suis tes oncles, n'as ore plus prochain." These words are to be taken literally: his father is dead.

the sources incorporated in the later action of the new poem, *Aliscans*, was an ancient poem in which Garin, together with his brothers, played a rôle. This rôle was suppressed as far as Garin was concerned, save for the traces cited above, and certain others too obscure to mention here. I conclude, therefore, that Garin formerly appeared in the original source from which the passages 4178-80 and 4919-20 were drawn. If, as has been said, he appeared in the muster of the sons of Aymeri de Narbonne, his name was found in the *laisse* in *i*. Inasmuch as tradition ascribed to him a career in Italy, with his father-in-law, Boniface, the statements about his having fought at St. Marc de Venise would contain nothing surprising. The elimination of his name in this *laisse*, together with the mistake, made easy for reasons of rhyme, of retaining the words: *Saint Marc de Venis*, would explain satisfactorily the ascription of these words to Aïmer, whose name followed in the *laisse*.

As for the other sources that treat of Aïmer, what ones ascribe to him Spain, what ones Italy?

In line 216, ss. of the *Nerbonois*, Aymeri tells our hero that he is to conquer Spain: cf. 538; 1048; 1176; 2852-53; 2877-78; 3000-08; 3319-20. Again, it is stated in the passage beginning with line 5914, that Aïmer arrives from towards Spain. At the close of the poem, however, in line 7951, we read that Aïmer returned to *Venice la grant*! This sudden abandonment of all the past geography touching Aïmer can only be a late addition.¹

According to the testimony of the *Enfances Vivien*,² of the *Siege de Barbastre*, of the *Mort Aymeri*, the *Prise de Cordres*, *Guibert d'Andrenas*, the scene of Aïmer's exploits was in Spain; according to *Aymeri de Narbonne*, the chronicle of

¹ Perhaps enough passages have been cited from this poem to show that Aïmer cannot have had Italy as his stage of action. One more may be added: in line 6625, Boniface is said to have seen our hero only once before the present meeting.

² See line 4613, ms. of Boulogne. The ms. in prose, whose authority is slight, indicates Venice: line 1670.

Aubri de Trois-Fontaines, and the *Willehalm*, Italy. The weight of evidence favors overwhelmingly the testimony of the *Nerbonesi*, especially when we consider that the evidence of *Aliscans* in reality indicates Spain. It will be seen later that testimony is to be found in the *Covenant* looking in the same direction.

Another important point of difference between the account of Andrea and that of the poems extant lies in the relations of Vivien to Aïmer and to Guillaume. We have already seen in the Italian account the close connection between Vivien and Aïmer. It is to him that Vivien looks for aid in time of trouble; he evidently occupies the position of favorite uncle which *Aliscans* and the *Covenant* give to Guillaume. In all the range of epics treating of Guillaume and Orange, nothing is more firmly rooted, it would appear, in tradition, and certainly nothing is more touching, than the affection of the young Vivien for Guillaume and for Guibor, and theirs for him. The Italian story reverses all this. Vivien becomes the foster child of Aïmer, and shows so little interest in the affairs of Orange that his friends have difficulty in persuading him to accompany them to deliver the city.¹ It would seem that here at least the authority of the French monuments could not be questioned, and that Andrea must certainly have invented his strange account.

A close study of this matter, however, has led me to feel that the contrary is true; that the tale of Andrea is correct, and represents a stage of the legend of Vivien, Aïmer, and Guillaume considerably older than that preserved in the French epics. Such a reversal of the pole of attraction is indeed amazing, and any proper treatment of the subject would demand a volume. All that I shall attempt here will be to state my conclusions, referring the reader to a fuller statement elsewhere.²

Aïmer and Vivien were at one time independent heroes, with the scene of their deeds in Spain. Later, Vivien became

¹*Nerbonesi*, I, p. 498.

²See *The Origin of the Cov. Viv.*, already cited.

subordinated to Aïmer, and was said to be his nephew, the son of a sister, of course. In time, however, the rising sun of a new hero subordinated the cycle of Aïmer, who was now said to be a brother of Guillaume. This subordination undoubtedly entailed the loss of a portion of the epic matter of the cycle of Aïmer. The story of the *Nerbonesi* (which we may for brevity designate as N) presents the stage of affairs at this juncture: the scene of the activity of Aïmer and Vivien is still Spain, and Aïmer is still the favorite uncle. It now happened that the cycle of Guillaume, which had developed to an astonishing degree of richness, broke, so to speak, under its own weight. In time, new poems were built out of the ruins of the old. Orange was made more than ever the centre of the action, Aïmer was largely eliminated, and Vivien became attached in the manner we all know to Guillaume and to Orange. The very scene of his death in battle was, in the popular mind, transferred from Spain to the neighborhood of Orange.

Traces of this vast change are still to be observed in the *Covenant* and in *Aliscans*, both of them composite poems built from the ruins of others. The first of these two poems, the *Covenant*, which we may denominate C, was formed by the fusion of two poems: the events of one of these,—the foray of Vivien into "Portugal," his being besieged, the unsuccessful attempt of Aïmer and some of his nephews to rescue him, the second attempt, which proved successful, the marching of the two heroes to deliver Orange—have already been related. The second poem recounted the death of Vivien in Spain, and the fearful defeat of his uncle Guillaume, Aïmer having perished at the delivery of Orange. The first of these two poems was lost as a separate epic because another greater poem, on which it depended, the *Siège d'Orange*, had lost its identity in the destruction that had come over the cycle. The action of the *Siège* was necessary to explain the setting of the smaller poem whose hero Vivien was. The existence of this smaller poem, however, is still certified to by traces left in

those portions of the *Siège* which entered into a new epic then coming into existence, the present *Aliscans*. In fact, in this epic, in lines 2601-03, we are told, just as the recital of N demands, that Aïmer was not in France, but was in Spain, warring day and night with the Saracens. N tells how, because of this, the messenger went to Spain, found Aïmer and Vivien, and came with them to the delivery of Orange. Fortunately, we have preserved also in another portion of the *Siège* utilized in *Aliscans*, the arrival of Aïmer, although no explanation has been given of the manner of his being informed of the straits of the city. See lines 4245-51. Finally, the chance preservation of another line bears witness to the presence also of the messenger, who, from the exigencies of the new epic, is not supposed to be present.¹

In C, an effort was made to root out Aïmer absolutely, and to substitute Guillaume for him. This has generally been done successfully, yet in one passage the remanieurs have betrayed themselves. Their method was to ascribe to Guillaume the deeds of Aïmer as far as possible, and in other passages to replace the name of Aïmer by that of Aymeri. This was easy to do in most cases. One reads such lines as the following in C without great surprise, although the importance given the grandfather Aymeri indicates rather the period of decadence than that of virility :

Forment maudit Aymeri et Guillelme, (156)

Ne ja reproche n'en aura Aymeris,
Guibor la bele, Guillaumes li marchis, (413-14)

Bien pert qu'il est del lignaige Aymeri, (517)

Dolanz en iert Aymeris et Guillelmes,
Guiberz li rous, et tuit cil de sa geste, (623-24)

Quant le saura Aymeris au vis fier,
Et dans Guillaumes et Guibor sa moillier, (794-95).

¹ Line 4931. Cf. *Romania*, xxviii, pp. 127, 128.

The number of these passages is, however, so great, that one begins to wonder at the absence of the name of Aïmer. Indeed, only one other uncle, Bernart, is absent from the poem. This appears doubly suspicious when we reflect that the scene of the poem is that same Spain which the most ancient legend ascribes as especial scene of activity to Aïmer. But when we find the following passage, we hesitate no longer to see in the persistent avoidance of the name of Aïmer something very like a conspiracy: in lines 1850-56, Vivien says that if his uncle Guillaume will place him on horseback, put the bridle in his hands, and guide him into the thick of the Saracens, he will vanquish the best of them, or, if not,

Ainz ne fui niés Aymeri ne Guillelme.

Since Aymeri is his grandfather and Guillaume his uncle, it seems clear that the remanieurs have here been caught in the act, for, with all the elasticity of the word *niés*, it cannot fit both the persons named.

Nor does the substitution of *Aymeri* for *Aïmer*, in my opinion, stop with C. It seems to extend to *Aliscans*, which is perfectly natural, since portions of this latter poem are woven from the same woof as C. The whole presence in *Aliscans* of Aymeri, which has with justice surprised the critics, is due to this substitution of his name for that of Aïmer. This began in a series of passages which still give trouble. These passages are found in the following lines of *Aliscans*: 5968-72, 6249-51, 6645-47; cf. 5693-94. The nature of the difficulty in these passages will be apparent from a citation of the first three. In the first passage, Guillaume is fighting with an enemy in battle:

Ja li tranchast la teste maintenant,
Mes au rescorre poignant .xx. m. Persant.
Et d'autre part François li combatant,
Et Aymeris et toz ses .vi. enfanz,
Et si neveu, et si appartenant.

In the second passage, a duel is going on during the battle :

Et d'autre part contrevail li Archans,
Se recombât Guillaumes li vaillans,
Et Aymeris, et toz ses .vi. enfanz.

In the third passage, Rencart is assailed by a number of enemies :

Mes au rescorre vint Guillaume[s] poignant,
Et Aymeris, et tuit li .v. enfant,
Et si neveu et si autre parent.

The first of these passages reads fairly well, save for the last line. We do not know of any nephews or cousins of Aymeri in the battle. From the second and third passages one would never suppose that Guillaume also is one of Aymeri's children. Indeed, a person unacquainted with the legend would suppose that he was anything else rather than one of the *enfanz*. Yet, if the name Aymeri be here in its place, the *enfanz* are Guillaume's brothers. The third passage contains again the word *neveu*, and has *five* instead of *six*. The repeated mention of six sons besides Guillaume would have a strange air, in view of the fact that the majority of the MSS. do not mention Garin as present. Then, too, the number five is puzzling.

I think that in all of these passages the original reading was *Aïmer*. The passages in question are from the battle that followed the arrival before Orange of Aïmer and his band, who had just come from relieving Vivien besieged. That is, these events originally followed immediately those of the first of the two poems whose union constituted C, and are from the very same current of epic narration. In the expedition which resulted in the relief of Vivien, Aïmer was accompanied by six nephews, of whom, by the way, Bertran was one. In the lost poem, they were probably designated always as *les six enfanz*. On the liberation of Vivien, there were seven of these cousins. They accompanied Aïmer to Orange, and played a brilliant rôle in the

delivery of the city, especially Vivien and Bertran. The same process of elimination of Aïmer that we have witnessed in C was extended to these events, nor could it well have been otherwise, since it was all one narration: *Aliscans*, in fact, as we see, begins without any preamble, and is really, at least for its beginning, one and the same poem as C. Inasmuch as there were present six brothers of Guillaume in the battle that released Orange, the change from *Aïmer* to *Aymeri*, the father of the six brothers, was perhaps unconscious; but if intentional, nothing was easier to do, because of the parallelism in numbers and the similarity in names. In view of the elimination of Aïmer from C and the obliteration of the poem concerning the relief of Vivien, the substitution was inevitable. The changing of *Aymeri* into *Aïmer* in the above passages, gives them a natural air. Of course, the possessive *ses* should be changed to *les*. But why are there only six cousins? The first passage follows immediately the dangerous wounding of Vivien: see lines 5932-36, hence there are only six cousins left. As for the third passage, where only five cousins are mentioned, it is to be explained by supposing one of the six, probably Bertran, to be in mortal danger. The others hasten to his aid.¹

Finally, to take up the last important difference between the account of N and that of the French poems, where did Aïmer die? N says in the battle for the delivery of Orange; the *Mort Aymeri*, at Porpaillart.² Assuredly, the poem is not a very creditable witness, yet it may well be that, at one time in the legend of our hero, he was said to have met death as here indicated. Indeed, as between the two statements, that of the *Mort Aymeri* has more likelihood of being primitive

¹ The fact that in the lines immediately preceding it is Renoart who is in danger, cuts no figure whatever. It is admitted by all good critics that Renoart is a late addition to the geste, and had originally nothing to do with *Aliscans*.

² *Aye d'Avignon* states that our hero perished in battle, but does not say where: see p, 46 of this poem, in the *Anciens Poëtes de la France*.

than that of N, for the reason that this latter has him die before Orange, a city with which originally he can have had nothing to do, whereas he may well have perished in a battle at Porpaillart. The history of this city as it concerns the legend of Guillaume is yet to be written, and offers some most interesting developments.¹

It has been seen that, in nearly all particulars, the account of N concerning Aïmer represents a stage of the legend considerably more ancient than that of the Old French poems preserved.

What sense was attached to the word *chétif* as applied to Aïmer in the old poems? The word seems to be used always in the sense of poor, unfortunate. Yet it is more than likely that the original meaning of this epithet was *captive*. If this be true, the explanations offered by N and by the *Nerbonois* are both relatively modern. N, however, it will be noted, seems to consider the term to mean unfortunate, not poor in this world's goods, for it depicts him as the master of many cities: we read of him: "erasi fatto maggiore signore della maggiore parte di Spagna. E sempre la sua vita era stare a campo, e mai non dormiva in terra murata, e non sedeva a tavola, e non beveva vino, *per la maladizione che gli diè Amerigo, suo padre.*"² Again: "Namieri si destò, e rizzosi ritto da dormire il valente signore della grande parte di Spagna."³

There is some evidence preserved in the *Nerbonois* indicat-

¹ Negative testimony would indicate that Aïmer did not die at Porpaillart, judging by *Foucon*. Tibaut in this poem admits having received great injury from the Christians at "Barzelone et Porpaillart." He boasts that the Christians paid dear, however, for Tortelouse, in losing Vivien there. Had Aïmer perished at Porpaillart in the legend utilized by *Foucon*, it would be stated by him that, while he had lost heavily at Barzelone, the Christians had paid dearly for Porpaillart and Tortelouse, Aïmer having perished at Porpaillart, Vivien at Tortelouse. See *Foucon*, p. 83, edition Tarbé. *Foucon*, by the way, is vastly more worthy of credit than the *Mort Aymeri*.

² P. 138, vol. 1. For his wealth, see *Nerbonois*, 3243.

³ P. 119, vol. 1.

ing that Aïmer had to suffer a captivity.¹ In a passage beginning in line 3009, Charlemagne, pleased with the young Aïmer, who is about to go away to conquer Spain, assures him that he will never be in a country so far away, but what, if the Saracens put him in prison, he, Charlemagne, will come with his barons to deliver him. In lines 3020-21, Aïmer is said to be joyful because of this assurance. These passages certainly indicate that there was once sung an expedition for the rescue of Aïmer. They may of course have been inserted by some poet eager to have a nail on which to hang a new poem, or they may be the last echo of an ancient legend concerning the captivity of Aïmer. The probability of the latter being true is much heightened by a significant line in the vow before the emperor. Aïmer swears never to be sheltered by a roof, etc., *unless the Saracens have him in prison: Se Sarrazin ne m'ont enprisoné* (2920). It is more than likely, then, that the epithet *chétif* meant originally captive, and that these passages preserve the last, faint trace of a forgotten story. If this supposition be correct, Aïmer was in the earliest legends concerning him in *langue d'oïl* the friend of Charlemagne and his predecessor in the conquest of Spain.² Taken prisoner during some expedition, he enjoyed the signal honor of being freed by the august emperor himself, under whom, and not under Louis, his epic history was placed. The most ancient poems concerning him having disappeared, his diminished fame was still great enough for the cycle of Orange to lay hands upon him, but the epithet by which he had been known was sooner or later misunderstood, and was taken to mean unfortunate, poor. A new legend, based in part upon some trait of the original hero, sprang up about his already venerable name. For a period after he was thus drawn into the planetary system of Guil-

¹ Cf. G. Paris, *Manuel*, 38: "Aïmer le chétif . . . qui tire son surnom de sa longue captivité chez les Sarrasins."

² That Aïmer was first sung in Provençal, is here taken for granted. Cf. G. Paris, *Naimeri*, in the *Mélanges Léonce Couture*, pp. 349 ss., Toulouse, 1902.

laume, the minor satellite of Vivien continued to revolve around him (the stage of N), but was finally drawn to a mightier centre of attraction, Guillaume (stage of the extant French poems). In this way, by successive stages, the epic glory of Aïmer was diminished, until he became one of the most obscure and remote of the six orbs that were set to twinkle about the central sun of Guillaume. *Chétif* indeed !

RAYMOND WEEKS.